



Key skills communication Level 3 – Manufactured Pop

Tuesday 13th November 2007

Source Booklet

- This booklet contains source material for the level 3 communication test, **Manufactured Pop**
 - The test questions will be based on this material
 - You must hand in this source booklet at the end of the test, along with your question paper and answer booklet
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The level 3 communication test will assess your ability to:

- select and read material to obtain the required information
- identify accurately, and compare, the lines of reasoning and main points from the text and images
- synthesise the key information in a way that is relevant to the purpose
- select and use a format and style of writing that is appropriate to the purpose and subject matter
- organise relevant information clearly and coherently
- ensure text is legible and spelling, grammar and punctuation are accurate

First published in 2007.

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Ref: COM-L3-Q3-P4-v7.4-URN:707

Audiences must be told if singers are miming

Sir Elton John famously accused Madonna of doing it, the President of Turkmenistan has banned it and now the Musicians' Union wants something done about it.

The union has launched a campaign calling on artists, record producers and promoters to tell audiences if a performance is mimed. From now on, it says, miming (or 'lip-synching') should be clearly labelled. People who pay for a concert ticket or watch a music television show should have the right to know whether it is live or not, the union says. Before a singer uses lip-synching, a logo should be flashed on screen warning it will be done. Concert promoters should also make it clear to people before they buy tickets that part of a show would be mimed, the union says.

It hopes the campaign, launched on BBC2's *The Culture Show*, will garner support throughout the entertainment industry. If a system of coding was introduced, the union believes it would help to boost the profile of British artists around the world.

Keith Ames, of the Musicians' Union, said: "Technology and culture are developing to the point where people are buying tickets to shows, or watching on television, and it's hard for them to know whether the acts are miming or really singing live." Mr Ames insisted the union was not seeking to outlaw miming altogether. "This is not us being anti-technology or against the use of recordings. What we're trying to do is reward those acts, bring to the public attention those acts, which do perform live. If you buy a tin of beans, you know what the contents are, but you could buy tickets to a show thinking it's going to be live and some of it isn't."

Lip-synching is most common in big arena shows, often starring boy and girl bands, in smaller theatre shows, when often the production cannot afford to pay a full complement of musicians, and on pop music television programmes.

The singer Beverley Knight told the BBC2 programme: "What I can't bear are those who are more than capable of delivering a show live with musicians and the whole thing, and don't. Why? Because they want to save their voices. It is easy to do. They get their cheque at the end of the day. In other words, they are not prepared to work. If the code came into being, there would be a whole lot of people whose careers would be over tomorrow, those in front of the camera and those behind it."

Faye Tozer, a singer with the former pop group *Steps*, is a defender of lip-synching. "Our main reason was because you would be up at five o'clock doing kids' TV, straight away into the studio. There's not time for rehearsal, not time for getting your crew in, and then you would be put on to your next children's TV at seven o'clock. For a band like ours that were very much a TV-selling band, it was great for us and we could get our product out there."

Pop groups have mimed on TV shows since the 1960s and there was a time when bands lip-synching to their hits on *Top of the Pops* was the stuff of national debate. A *Top of the Pops* spokeswoman said, "Most bands want to play live and, if we can do it acoustically, then we will. It makes for a better show."

It seems some of the more choreographed pop acts have accepted they cannot jump around the stage and sing pitch-perfect at the same

time. Jonathon Brown, features editor of *Smash Hits*, said it was fair that someone like Britney Spears focused on her dance routine. "It's part of the spectacle of her show, which is not just about singing. If you are doing the heavily choreographed moves you have to make a choice whether you are going to stand still and sing, or dance. Fans want to see Britney perform for over two hours and they want something to talk about afterwards." Mr Brown also pointed out that Spears was not miming because of any suggestion she could not sing.

The issue of miming came to the fore when Sir Elton accused Madonna of lip-synching at the *Q* Awards in 2004 after she was

nominated for best live act award. He said: "Since when has lip-synching been live? Anyone who lip-synchs in public when you pay £75 to see them should be shot." Madonna strongly denied that she mimes songs, and issued a statement insisting that every note of her recent tour had been live. Indeed, in an interview in *Q* magazine, Madonna criticised TV shows like *Pop Idol* for creating music stars based on their looks rather than their talent.

Interestingly, in 2005, Turkmenistan's leader Saparmurat Niyazov banned singers from lip-synching, and the government of Vietnam has also outlawed the practice.

Source: Based on an article by Ciar Byrne, *The Independent*, 3 February 2006.

DOCUMENT 2

□ *Dear Sir,*

Your recent series of articles on boy bands and 'manufactured pop' made me realise what a total sham the music industry is today. It has to be a conspiracy, one that is secretly planned, plotted and perfectly executed by rival record companies. Highly paid music bosses are doing something unknown to the music lover. They are manufacturing boy bands. This is not a fantasy. How else can one account for the number of girl groups and boy bands that sprout every six months or so like a rash of wild mushrooms? Is there, therefore, a secret factory somewhere that manufactures groups designed to sell pop to teeny boppers?

If you are a serious rock 'n' roller or even a pop music fan, you're probably wondering what the next big thing in music will be. Stop holding your breath. The musical equivalent of fast food is being perfected and sold to you in the form of manufactured pop.

Look at how girl pop stars Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera have fared. Both bitter rivals, they have one thing in common; a massive fan following which translates into massive album sales which translates into massive amounts of money which translates to ecstatic industry executives which translates to good business for banks. Feel left out of this happy circle? Don't be. Your money has made the difference to their kitty.

So where does the appeal of boy bands come from? Well, each member of a boy band is chosen for his good looks and dancing ability. Never mind if they cannot compose or sing well, all that can come later. Accomplished songwriters are brought in to compose songs that will not challenge the vocal pipes of the boys. When they are

on TV, they can simply mime to the recordings anyway.

The songs are variations of only two themes. The first is the lightly funky type, the kind of pumped up beat that you can exercise to. The second theme is the soothing ballad kind; the kind of song that works as a balm for your wound; the kind of song you wave both your hands to in the air from right to left to right.

If record labels do not wish to engage songwriters, it's much easier to buy other people's already recorded songs. Example? Almost all of Boyzone's number one hits are those composed and sung by the Bee Gees and Cat Stevens. Not that the Bee Gees are complaining, what with the hefty sums of money coming their way as rights and royalties.

It works differently for the girls. Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson and Mandy Moore are all projected as nubile nymphets you can lust after but not touch. They are tight-bodied, unbuttoned, pin-up fantasies and that's what they'll always remain.

Manufactured pop and miming existed in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s too, except that the basic idea has dramatically shifted from originality to imitation. In those decades, writing, producing and instrument playing were also done by others, but at least the songs were memorable. There was craft, there was melody, and at times there was even originality.

Today, boy bands are so bland and sound so alike, it's almost not music. It's bubblegum to be chewed. It's not a trip to Disneyland, it's living life permanently inside Disneyland.

Yours, etc

Vinod Advani

Source: Adapted from an article in The Hindu (an English-language Indian Newspaper), 3 December 2000.

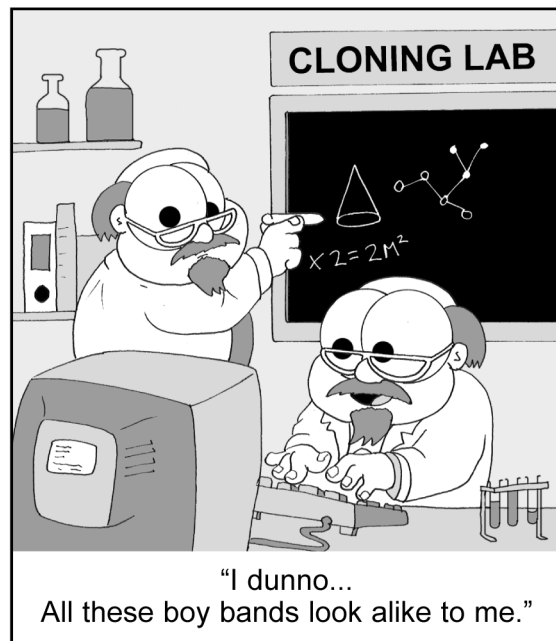
The perfect boy band

Louis Walsh*, manager of *Westlife*

The perfect package will hook as many fans as possible, so you need five different looks: blond, dark, cheeky, camp and macho. Girls like guys from Eminem to Ronan Keating, so you have to include something for everyone. If someone didn't like *Take That*, they might still have had a soft spot for band member Robbie because he's a character. Five is the magic number: it gives people just enough to look at. Some groups have three in the band and it doesn't look right. When I was forming *Boyzone* I was tempted to have four, though, because it would have been much easier to fit them in a taxi!

I like to have one guy in the band who has a bit of an edge because he'll attract the girls who fancy baddies, but a group full of bad boys, like *Five* or *East 17*, will never do big business. It's best if they look like every young girl's boy next door, with the difference that he's able to smile and dance and sing. The girls must believe in the backs of their minds that one day they'll go out with him. It doesn't help the fanbase if one of the boys is in a relationship or having a baby – but I can't control their lives as much as I'd like to.

What you can control is the formation of the band. You can't leave it up to luck that five talented people will find each other



and make it. You need a whole team around the band to groom them, bring them songs, choreography, styling and get them on all the big TV and radio shows. They've got to be able to sing and project some personality.

Then the rest is up to the girls. They go crazy, buy all their records, posters and DVDs and go to every show they can. And then they grow up. But the boys do, too; when you see facial hair, earrings and tattoos and they start to talk about being individuals, it's time to go to the conveyor belt and get a new set.

* Louis Walsh set up boy band *Boyzone* and now manages *Westlife*, among other acts.

Source: Based on The Observer, 29 April 2001.

Factory Dreams

The children watch *McFly* on TV, go out and buy or download the album, access the *Smash Hits* website, buy the T-shirt and the alternative version of the album with a green covered sleeve. Then they find out that Stephen (there's got to be a Stephen in a boy band) has decided to wear red Nike trousers. Then they buy the red Nike trousers and a portion of their money find its way into the record label's coffers. Manufactured pop is often criticised for its ruthless desire to make money before making music. Nevertheless, parents do not complain at the exploitation of their children, happy in the knowledge that they are not listening to the *Sex Pistols'* demands to change the status quo, instead learning that "all I wanna do is zig-a-zig aaah". An invaluable message. Which one is preferable is a matter of personal taste.

The fans are often not the only exploited teenagers, with the band themselves being used for a few months and thrown onto the scrap-heap. The first million copies of Will Young's debut single grossed approximately £4.4 million. Of that, 90% was split between retailers, his record company, production costs and the songwriters. The final 10% went to Will Young. However, Young also had to pay his management company, producer and video costs leaving Young pocketing just over £156,000, well under 4% of what the single made. Of course, £150,000 can't be sniffed at but it was the quickest selling single of all time and well up in the list of top-sellers for that year. Considering the fickle nature of the pop market, with many here today, gone tomorrow 'stars', it makes worrying reading for potential pop idols out there.

Outside of the pop puppets' personal problems, the other cost incurred through the over exposure of manufactured pop is the lack of investment into, and development of, 'real' music. It is a safer investment for record companies to buy into a chart-orientated band who will make a quick buck than to back a group of talented musicians whom the real music-lovers may, or may not, like and who could take some time to reach the top of the tree. *Pulp*, singers of the brilliant *Common People*, were around the scene for 15 years before their aptly titled *Different Class* stole up the album charts. Hence, music aficionados are asking if the new bands would ever get the backing to reach a mass audience. The volume of 'real' music on the airwaves is decreasing by the day, with quality bands such as *Radiohead* failing to reach the ears of many potential fans. Perhaps record company bosses do not want people listening to *Radiohead* since the manufactured bands offer a quicker and easier route to money than the true band. If manufactured bands rebel against their creators, the bosses will just pick other photogenic faces off the street.

Manufactured pop music certainly has its place in society, since its safe sound and pretty face is genuinely enjoyed by many and the odd classic it throws up is almost universally enjoyed. Those with the taste for more imaginative, creative and pure music will cling to the good old days of rock and roll and punk rock. However, this need not be the case. If the purer and the processed forms of music were given more equal exposure, through mainstream airtime given to classic rock, new music, processed music and all other forms of music, the situation would probably be more mutually beneficial.

Source: Adapted from an article from LBC-ONLINE, 25 March 2003. (LBC-ONLINE was a Young Enterprise Venture based in Elstree, Essex.)

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